

Message Text

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ACTION AF-08

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FM AMEMBASSY CAPE TOWN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5151

INFO AMCONSUL DURBAN

AMCONSUL JOHANNESBURG

AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

AMEMBASSY LONDON

C O N F I D E N T I A L CAPE TOWN 0506

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, IS, SF

SUBJ: ISRAELI AMBASSADOR'S COMMENTS ON VORSTER VISIT

1. DURING LUNCHEON CONVERSATION WITH ISRAELI AMBASSADOR ITZHAK UNNA TODAY (APRIL 30) HE MADE THE FOLLOWING OBSERVATIONS REGARDING THE BORSTER VISIT TO ISRAEL IN WHICH UNNA PARTICIPATED:

A. HE (UNNA) EXTENDED AN INVITATION TO THE PRIME MINISTER TO VISIT ISRAEL ABOUT A YEAR AGO. THE REPLY WHICH HE RECEIVED THEN WAS THAT THE SAG WAS NEGOTIATING WITH SUDAN OVER LANDING RIGHTS AND IT WOULD NOT BE OPPORTUNE FOR THE PM TO MAKE THE VISIT AT THAT TIME.

B. DURING THE IMF/IBRD MEETINGS LAST SEPTEMBER, ISRAELI MINISTER OF FINANCE APPROACHED SOUTH AFRICAN FINANCE MINISTER HORWOOD ON THE PROPOSITION OF ESTABLISHING A CABINET-LEVEL CONSULTATIVE MECHANISM TO REVIEW FINANCIAL-INVESTMENT MATTERS ON A ONCE-A-YEAR BASIS. THE PURPOSE OF SUCH A MECHANISM FROM THE ISRAELI STANDPOINT WAS TO GENERATE GREATER SOUTH AFRICAN INTEREST IN EXTENDING LOANS AND ENCOURAGING INVESTMENT IN
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ISRAEL. MINISTER HORWOOD WAS NON-COMMITTAL.

C. AFTER THE ANGOLAN SETBACK THE PRIME MINISTER REVIVED THE INVITATION. THE UNDERSTANDING WAS THAT IT WOULD BE A PRIVATE VISIT, MORE IN THE FORM OF A PILGRIMAGE THAN AN OFFICIAL TRIP.

D. WHILE VORSTER WAS IN ISRAEL, THE ISRAELI MINISTER OF FINANCE RAISED THE ISSUE OF GOI-SAG CONSULTATIONS WITHIN THE ISRAELI CABINET. PM RABIN AGREED TO TAKE IT UP WITH VORSTER HAVING IN MIND ISRAEL INTEREST IN SAG ASSISTANCE IN BUILDING THE RAILROAD BETWEEN PORT OF ELAT AND THE DEAD SEA TERMINAL. A SIDE TRIP TO ELAT WAS INCLUDED IN THE VORSTER PROGRAM TO GIVE HIM A FIRST VIEW OF THE PROJECT AND ITS STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE. WHEN PRIME MINISTER RABIN FLOATED THE CONSULTATION PROPOSAL WITH VORSTER, HE IMMEDIATELY GAVE HIS APPROVAL.

E. THE PLAY WHICH PRIME MINISTER VORSTER GAVE TO THE CONSULTATIVE MECHANISM DURING HIS PRESS CONFERENCE JUST BEFORE LEAVING ISREL CAME AS A GREAT SUPRISE. THE GOI LOOKED ON THE CONSULTATIVE MECHANISM AS A RATHER ROUTINE WAY OF OBTAINING GREATER SOUTH AFRICAN INVOLVEMENT IN ISRAELI DEVELOPMENT. THE WAY VORSTER PLAYED IT PUT THE WHOLE THING ON A POLITICAL PLANE.

F. WHEN UNNA GOT BACK TO CAPE TOWN AND SAW THE EUPHORIA BEING DISPLAYED IN THE PRESS AND AMONG GOVERNMENT SUPPORTES OVER THE VISIT, HE BECAME CONCERNED. THE CLOSE IDENTITY OF INTERESTS BEING DRAWN BETWEEN ISRAEL AND SOUTH AFRICA WAS PARTICULARLY DISTURBING. WHEN PM VORSTER, IN THE PARLIAMENT LAST WEEK, DESCRIBED THE NEED FOR FORMING A BLOCK OF MIDDLE-LEVEL POWERS AND IDENTIFIED ISRAEL AND SOUTH AFRICA AS THE FIRST MEMBERS OF SUCH A BLOCK (VORSTER INCLUDED IRAN, BRAZIL, AND TAIPEI IN THIS GROUP), UNNA SAID THAT HE BACAME DOUBLY CONCERNED AND CABLED HIS FOREIGN OFFICE ASKING WHETHER HE SHOULD NOT MAKE DISCREET REPRESENTATIONS TO DISCOURAGE THIS TYPE OF THINKING. THE MESSAGE THAT CAME BACK FROM TEL AVIV WAS TO DO NOTHING.

2. IN RESPONSE TO MY QUESTION ABOUT WHAT RISKS HE SAW FOR ISRAEL IN THE CLOSE IDENTIFICAGION PAINTED BY THE SOUTH
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AFRICANS, HE SAID THAT HE WAS CONCERNED ABOUT THE ARAB-AFRICAN REACTION ALTHOUGH IT WAS EXTREMELY DIFFICULT TO ESTIMATE WHAT THE SPECIFIC CONSEQUENCES WOULD BE. HE POINTED TO TWO DEFINITE ADVANTAGES TO BE DERIVED WHICH MIGHT HAVE BEEN MUCH MORE DIFFICULT HAD THE VIST NOT AKEN PLACE. THE FIRST OF THESE WAS THAT BY DIRECTLY INVOLVING THE PRIME MINISTER IN THE RAILROAD PROJECT, ISRAEL STOOD A MUCH BETTER CHANCE OF OBTAINING SOUTH AFRICAN CREDITS AND EQUIPMENT. HE HAD ALREADY EXPERIENCED

A MUCH MORE COOPERATIVE ATTITUDE AS HE PURSUED SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF THIS PROJECT AT THE CABINET AND SUB-CABINET LEVELS. THE SECOND BENEFIT WAS TO GET SOUTH AFRICA TO ALLOCATE SUFFICIENT COAL FOR SHIPMENT TO ISRAEL. THIS HE HAD ACCOMPLISHED. UNNA ESTIMAED THAT SOUTH AFRICA WOULD SUPPLY AROUND FIFTY PERCENT OF THEIR REQUIREMENTS.

3. WHEN I ASKED UNNA WHETHER ANY SPECIFIC AGREEMENTS HAD BEEN REACHED OTHER THAN THE CONSULTATIVE MECHANISMS, HE REPLIED NEGATIVELY. HE VOLUNTEERED THAT WHILE SOUTH AFRICANS ARE INTERESTED IN ARMS NO COMMITMENTS WERE MADE. ON NUCLEAR MATTERS HE PROFESSED NO KNOWLEDGE.

4. COMMENT: THERE ARE VARIOUS ASPECTS OF THE FOREGOING THAT HAVE SOMEWHAT OF A HOLLOW RING. THAT VORSTER EXPLOITED THE TRIP BEYOND WHAT THE ISRAELIS HAD ANTICIPATED MAY IN PART BE TRUE BUT IT IS HARD TO BELIEVE THAT THEY WERE TAKEN IN TO THE DEGREE SUGGESTED BY UNNA. ISRAELI INTEREST IN SOUTH AFRICAN COAL IS NO DOUBT GENUINE. HOW MUCH FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE SOUTH AFRICA WILL BE IN A POSITION TO PROVIDE IS PROBLEMATICAL GIVEN THE SAG'S SERIOUS BOP PROBLEMS. VORSTER HAS SKILLFULLY USED THE TRIP FOR PROPAGANDA ENDS. BEHIND THE ATMOSPHERICS THERE MAY WELL BE SOME IMPORTANT SUBSTANTIVE AGREEMENTS NOT NOW READILY APPARENT.

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